



Al-Risala 1989

October

Editorial

Over the last century, countless Islamic movements have sprung up in various parts of the Islamic world. The large majority of these movements have represented a reaction against colonialism and western (economic) domination. They have been political in nature. The fundamental message of Islam, which should provide the basis of any true Islamic movement has been obscured beneath superficial and mundane issues.

These movements have won extraordinary support amongst Muslim populations of the world. They have captured the Muslim imagination and spurred the masses to expend all their energies in opposing what they saw as tyranny and oppression. Yet despite the wide popular support they enjoyed, the Prophet. In 2 A.H. when the Battle of Badr was fought, he had under his command 313 dedicated and committed companions. Within twenty years of his death Islam had spread throughout the whole of North Africa and had made considerable inroads in Persia. Not only were these lands conquered, the language, attitudes and intellectual framework of their inhabitants was also radically altered. Why is it that the Prophet's Islamic movement was so devastatingly successful, while those that present-day Muslims initiate fail to establish the theoretical and practical ascendancy of Islam in even a small portion of the globe? There is no doubt that the reason for this is modern Islamic movements have been denied the divine succour which is essential for success. There is also no doubt that God has withheld His assistance because these movements have failed to accord to God's design which He has made manifest on earth by means of multiple signs.

God desires that the emphasis of any Islamic movement should be laid on the importance of preparation for the hereafter: He has spread countless signs throughout the universe which attest to the insignificance of this world in relation to eternity; He has sent prophets who constantly urged man to use his time on earth in cultivating his eternal crop and made this the basis of their mission. Yet modern Islamic movements have focused their attention on worldly issues and have distracted people's attention from the very issue which Islam is supposed to emphasize: that of eternity, an issue of fundamental and crucial importance to all mankind.

God desires that truth should be conveyed to man on an intellectual plane. The Koran stated emphatically that proofs of monotheism would soon be displayed to man in the cosmos and in his own being. Islam opened the way for scientific progress which has established emphatically man's limitations, and the existence in the cosmos of one all-pervading order according to which all things function. These conclusions are direct evidence in support of the two basic tenets of Islam: the need for prophetic revelation and the oneness and omnipotence of God. There is no need for us to force the issue now; the weaponry of knowledge is fully at our command. Yet modern Islamic movements have not made this

their theme. They have not operated on an intellectual level. They have insisted on pressing their demands in the unfertile arena of political confrontation.

God has decreed that His religion shall spread by virtue of compassion and forgiveness towards one's fellow-man. He sent a Prophet whose actions were an epitome of his divinely-endowed title, "Mercy for the world"; who spared his most dire enemies when he had them at mercy. Yet modern Islamic movements have forsaken this prophetic pattern and dealt brutally and inhumanly with their opponents.

All this shows that Muslims' efforts are being concentrated in the wrong direction. They have failed to enact their fundamental responsibility: communication of the prophetic message in a way that will leave no doubt in the minds of those they are addressing as to its validity; and leaving up. Their relationship with non-Muslims has founded on the rocks of political, social and nationalistic confrontation and has never been established on solid, fertile, spiritual ground. It is God's will that His religion should be supreme on earth. He has created the conditions necessary for this to be achieved, and has assigned to the followers of the Final Prophet the task of spreading the Faith. But Faith can only reign supreme when those who seek to propagate it work in accordance with God's design.

The three hundred and thirteen companions who took the field at Badr had aligned themselves with God's scheme. That is why the Holy Prophet prayed for their survival in such passionate terms. "If", he cried out to God, "they perish, then You will be worshipped no more on earth." They survived and by virtue of their efforts the world saw a revolution the like of which has not been seen on earth. Not only did they conquer people's territories; they won people's minds with the Koran and their hearts with their own actions. They established the intellectual dominance of monotheism, thus paving the way for scientific research into natural phenomena which had up till then been considered as inviolable objects of worship.

If a group of people emerge on this day and age who are as attuned to the divine will as they were, and work in compliance with the conditions which God has prepared for the establishment of His religion on earth, then there is no doubt that results can be achieved as they were in the early days of Islam.

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The Most worthwhile work is preaching the word of God.

The Prophet said: "That God should grant guidance, through you, to just one person is better for you than everything on which the sun rises."

Fear of God made the stick fall from his hand:

Abu Masud Ansari says that one day he became angry with his slave and began beating him with a stick. Just then he heard a voice from behind him, saying: "Abu Masud, realize.....", but, in his fury, he was unable to recognize the voice. When the speaker came nearer, he realized that it was the Prophet of God. "You should realize," said the Prophet, "that God has more power over you than you have over this slave." On hearing this, Abu Masud let the stick fall from his hand. "Never again will I beat a slave," he vowed, "and seeking God's good pleasure, I hereby give this slave his freedom." "If you had not done this, you would have been touched by the flames of Hell" said the Prophet.

(Muslim)

Being One of The Foremost

The Quran divides the People of Paradise into two broad categories. In one will be those nearest to God and in the other will be those who are rewarded in a more general sense. In the first category, the greater part will be made up of the earlier followers of the true religion. Those of later generations will mostly be placed in the second category.

This is expressed thus in the Quran:

You shall be divided into three multitudes; those on the right how happy shall be those to the right; and those on the left – how wretched shall be those on the left; and those to the fore shall be foremost. These will be those nearest to God in gardens of delight: a number of people from those of old and a few of those from later times (56:7-14).

Ibn Kathir, the Quranic commentator, explains the above verse as follows:

Without doubt, the first ones of every¹ community excel those of later times. Perhaps the verse refers to all communities in relation to their own particular status. To this effect, the Prophet of God said: ‘The best generation is my generation, then those who come after them and those who follow later.’²

Some religious historians have ascribed this difference to the fact that those who were the first converts to Islam had the benefit of the Prophet’s company, or else were nearer to being his contemporaries, and so were especially blessed. Later adherents were presumably less and less imbued with this special grace. This interpretation, however, is flawed, for it loses sight of the Quran’s assertion that there will be a mixture of people, some from earlier, some from later times in both categories, with those from earlier times forming the greater part of the “foremost” group.

The period in which the devotees lived is not actually the crucial factor in creating this difference. What really causes it is the status of the faith in the eyes of its adherents. During the time of the Prophet, the message of Islam was being taught to the world as something absolutely new. Those who heard that message and accepted it, were doing so as a result of a conscious decision. For them Islam was a discovery and a challenge. In that sense, their commitment to Islam was on a superior plane, and placed them in the ranks of the “foremost” in the eyes of God. Later as Islam was handed down from one generation to the next, it began to assume an ethnic character. It was something inherited, as opposed to being a discovery. And clearly, those two attitudes towards Islam are not equal. It is only those of later times who are able truly to discover Islam who will prove themselves worthy, as their predecessors were, of being admitted to the ranks of the ‘foremost’.

1. Ibn Kathir is referring here to every community following Prophet.
2. Ibn Kathir, *Tafseer*, vol. 4, p. 284.

All are equal before the law

An Egyptian came to Umer Ibn Khattab. "Commander of the Faithful," he said, "I have come to you to seek shelter from oppression." Umer told him that his request was granted.

"I had a race against Mohammad Ibn Amr Ibn Al-Aas, the son of the governor of Egypt," the man protested. "I overtook him and he got angry. He started whipping me, felling me at the same time: 'Take that! I come from a noble family.'" When Umer heard this, he immediately wrote to Amr Ibn Aas, telling him to bring his son to Medina at once. When they arrived, Umer called the Egyptian, gave him a whip and told him to whip the young man. Umer kept on saying: "Take that, member of a noble family," as he did so. When he had finished whipping Mohammad Ibn Amr Ibn Al-Aas, Umer told him to whip the boy's father as well, for the son had only acted because of his father's authority. "I have whipped the one who whipped me", the Egyptian replied. "Now I don't need to whip anybody else". "If you had whipped him, then we would not have stopped you," Umer told him. "But if you let him go yourself, then that is another matter." Then, addressing Amr Ibn Al-Aas, he said: "Since when have you enslaved people who were born free?"

In Satan's Footsteps

In the present day and age, the most effective vehicle for the transmission of information is the news media, of which the Muslims' Urdu newspapers are perhaps the most strident. They give the impression of having taken it upon themselves to publish exactly those news items which the Quran warns us should be carefully looked into before being publicly aired and dissected. There are countless newspapers being brought out by Muslims in this country, but they all have one thing in common -- a tendency to exaggerate and sensationalize anything they hear regarding relations between the country's two largest communities.

Umar Farooq once entered the Prophet's Mosque in Medina to find a group of Companion muttering amongst themselves that the Prophet had divorced all his wives. In spite of the fact that it was Prophet's own companions, and furthermore, this was being said in no less hallowed a place than the Prophet's own mosque, Umar Farooq refused to believe in this rumour. He immediately made it clear that he could not accept this statement solely on the basis of hearsay, and pointed out that he would have to make enquiries of the Prophet himself before he could venture any opinion.

Umar went, therefore, to the Prophet's dwelling, where he was reassured by the Prophet that he had done no such thing as divorce any of his wives. Umar returned forthwith to the Prophet's mosque, where, from the gateway, he proclaimed in a voice that all could hear, "The Prophet has not divorced his wives." It was on this occasion that the following verse of the Quran was revealed:

When they hear any news concerning security or fear, they at once make it known to all; whereas if they had reported it to the Prophet and those in authority, those who sought knowledge could learn it from them. But for Allah's grace and mercy, all but a few of you would have followed the devil (3:83).

This is a piece of Quranic wisdom which urgently needs to be applied to the way news is handled in India on the communal situation, and intercommunal riots in particular. But, in fact, it is constantly ignored or defied. How many Muslims are there, if any, in this country who take the trouble to look fully into anti-Hindu news or news items aimed at intensifying inter-communal hatred. I have yet to find any substantial number of Muslims who are given to forming their opinions only after due consideration of all relevant aspects of the matter in hand. They only need to hear something against the majority community or government departments and they spread it all around as though it were an established fact.

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When the Prophet's Companion committed an error of this nature, it was no more than a temporary aberration on their part, for as soon as they were reminded of what would have been right and proper on this occasion, they did everything they could to make amends. Muslims of the modern age, however, seem to have this erroneous approach thoroughly ingrained in them, because for the last half-century they have persistently indulged in mindless calumny. Such activity now goes by the name of 'yellow journalism', and, being a lucrative business, is regularly engaged in by a substantial group of Muslims. What they fail to realize (or perhaps choose to ignore) is that this highly remunerative profession of theirs has been labelled in the Quran as "following in Satan's footsteps."

In the above-quoted verse, it was mentioned that any matter of importance should be referred to the Prophet and others in authority. There are two points worth making here. One is that every such piece of information should be weighed up and scrutinized in the light of the Prophet's teachings and the pattern which he set for us to follow. It is this *Sunnah* of the Prophet which should determine the Muslims' response in matters of controversy. This means that they should avoid being pulled in whatever direction their nationalistic sentiments may take them. The other point to be made is that controversial matters should be referred to those in authority. But this commandment can be carried out only if people of genuine authority exist among the Muslims. If such people are not easily accessible, the Muslims should take it upon themselves to find, or constitute a body of responsible people to whose decisions they will readily bow. Only then will the Muslims be able to offer a coherent and reasonable response in any given situation. Unless and until they see the folly of their ways, they will continue to follow the path of individual caprice which, according to the Quran will amount to following in the footsteps of the devil.

9 October 1989

Whatever happens is the will of God.

When certain people offered to guard Ali (the fourth Caliph), the son of Abu Talib, the latter replied, "Destiny is man's guardian." According to another tradition, he said, "No man will taste the joy of faith until he realizes that he could never have escaped what has be fallen him, nor enjoyed what escaped him."

(Abu Dawood)

Remaining steadfast in the face of persecution

During the Abbasid Caliphate the emergence of the Mutazilite creed stirred up controversy among Muslims, as a result of which Imam Ahmad ibn Hambal had severe punishments inflicted upon him. Yet he refused to alter the position he had adopted. Hafiz ibn Hajar tells that he was beaten so severely as to make “even an elephant flee.”

Their Own Crown on Another's Head

Bernard Shaw once remarked, "If a man like Muhammad were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world he would solve its problems in a way that would bring it much needed peace and happiness." The Mohammad, may peace be upon him, concerning whom Bernard Shaw made this remark is a figure who has fourteen hundred years of history behind him; his prophethood and incomparable impact on human destiny have become established historical facts. In the light of history, it is relatively easy to make such a remark; it was extremely difficult, however, to see the greatness of the Prophet Moharnmad when history had not proved it.

But the Companions of the Prophet realized the Prophet's greatness with such conviction that they proved themselves ready to disclaim all claims to personal greatness on his behalf. A crown which had been meant for them, they gladly placed upon his more worthy head.

Abdullah Ibn Ubayy was considered the most outstanding personality in Medina before the arrival of the Holy Prophet. Endowed with extraordinary intelligence, he was the natural leader of his people. Accordingly, the people of Medina chose him to be their king; in this way they hoped that the conflict and strife which prevailed among them would cease. As a symbol of his sovereignty, it was decided that he should be crowned.

Arrangements for Abdullah Ibn Ubayy's coronation were complete when Islam reached Medina. Islam appealed to the people's nature and spread into every home. When this happened, some representatives of the people went to Mecca to meet the Prophet. They heard the message of Islam from him. It struck them that Mohammad Ibn Abdullah, the Prophet of Islam, was the person most suited for the task of looking after the affairs of Medina. On behalf of the people of Medina, they asked him come to their town and become their leader.

This was no ordinary event. It amounted to placing their own crown on the head of another. Such a thing was unheard of in the ancient tribal period. It has always been most difficult for one nation to unconditionally offer its leadership to someone from another nation and it was more difficult than ever in the atmosphere that prevailed in Arabia at that time.

Moreover, the "Mohammad" to whom they were offering their crown was not the great historical figure with whom we are familiar today. It was a person who had been expelled by his people; it was a person who had not accrued national stature and historical importance. He was not only a controversial personality, he was a destitute and homeless one. He was a person to whom the people of Medina were giving everything, without expecting anything in return.

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The bravest is the most in control of himself

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud records the Prophet as asking his companions: "Whom do you consider brave?" "One who triumphs in a wrestling match," suggested some of the companions. "Not so," the Prophet corrected them. "It is rather one who controls himself when he is angry."

Daddy Smokes, Why Shouldn't I?

The truth is that Islam will only come into its own when there is a passionate urge to reform others. It will be in satisfying this urge that Muslims themselves will become responsible men of religion, just as Abdul Shakoor's concern for his son lead him sacrificing what, for him, was a major sensual pleasure.

Thus the passionate urge to reform others will cause Muslims too to reform themselves.

Muslims are fond of saying that before Islam can be effectively presented to others, Muslims themselves must be demonstrably earnest in the practice of their own religious observances. But often things happen in reverse. It is in fact the passionate urge to reform others which causes one to reform oneself.

A case in point is that of Malik Abdul Shakoor from Budhal in Rajouri, India. At an early age he had become a chain smoker and had successfully resisted all attempts on the part of friends and family to make him give it up. In fact, in complete disregard of all warnings given by medical men and public notices, he even persuaded friends to start smoking. His views on the subject had reached such absurd extremes that he even used to say that those who did not share his predilection for a cigarette after a cup of tea had no right to drink tea either.

Then, one fine day, he found that his three-year-old son, Farooq Qaisar, had developed the habit of picking up his discarded cigarette ends and putting them in his mouth. In reply to his mother's anguished entreaties to give up this revolting habit, the little boy said, "But Daddy smokes Why shouldn't I?" Abdul Shakoor was shocked to hear his own little son speak in this way. It was suddenly borne in upon him that his own son's health—his very life, was at stake. Suddenly all the artificial barriers which he had erected in the face of the truth, which was that smoking was injurious to health, and ruinous from the point of view of the family budget, were swept away by this sudden outburst from his own child. He at once realized that, in his heart of hearts, he had known all along what the inherent dangers were. It was just that, psychologically, he was unprepared to make that concession to others. He then simply had to ask himself. "If I don't give up smoking, how can I stop my son from smoking?" There was only one answer to that question: he decided to give up smoking.

It was the month of Ramadhan, the month of fasting, and he vowed that he would there and then give up smoking. And he has not broken his vow to this day.

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A good deed is of no value if it makes one proud.

Ibn Ataullah As Sikandari wrote in his book, Al-Hikam: "A sin which makes one meek and humble is better than a good deed which makes one proud and arrogant."

Of all actions, the most sublime is remembrance of God.

Abu Darda reports the Prophet as asking his companions:

“Should I not tell you of the action that is best and most pure in the presence of your Lord; the action which will raise you up in the sight of God, and is better for you than great expenditure of gold and silver; better too than that you should meet your enemies in battle, striking their necks and they striking yours?” “Do tell us,” the Companions replied, “It is remembrance of God,” said the Prophet.

(Tirmidhi)

The Correct Focus

Focussing one's attention on one issue to the exclusion of all else is a meaningful preoccupation only if one has chosen the correct goal. The majority of the thinking people of this world—whether leaders or followers – picture to themselves objectives which they deem worthy of attainment, and in terms of the purely material side of our earthly existence, they are not wrong in pursuing such goals.

For example, Karl Marx ignored religion, ethics and philosophy in favour of economics and what he perceived to be a never ending class struggle. Tolstoy related all of his learning and experience to humanitarianism. Freedom fighters in oppressed countries have given up their lives to liberating their homelands from the slavery of colonialism. Socialists, industrialists and politicians become totally engrossed in the distribution of power, the nation's, wealth and problems of defense and aggression.

But, to the preacher of truth, none of the burning issues of the day are of the slightest relevance. The problems of this life are as unimportant to him as the problems of the next life are to our leaders. The man who are at the helm of affairs, concerned as they are with the 'here' and the 'now' of our existence, pay scant attention to what life will be in the next world. Our political leaders in particular, make it their business to keep the minds of their followers on political, social and economic dangers, with a view to projecting their own images as great Saviours of the people. Sometimes, instead of stating these problems in secular terms, they have recourse to a great fund of religious terminology, knowing that this will have a greater impact with a broad section of the public. But dressing state ideas up in religious garb does not render them any more true, nor does it turn mundane objectives into what ought to be the true goals of our existence – the quest for truth and the worship of the Almighty. In short, our, attention needs to be focussed not on the issues of this world, but on the Hereafter.

Science was Born out of Islamic Revolution

One of the consequences of the intellectual revolution based on monotheism was that man began to look at nature as a powerless creature, and that man had the right to investigate it and bring it to his service. The beginning of this tendency came from the Umayyad period (661-750) in Damascus. To ancient Greek philosophers alchemy was the name of a craze to turn silver into gold. Khalid bin Yazid bin Muawiya is probably the first person who attempted to develop alchemy into physical science. During Abbasid Caliphate this science was further developed in Baghdad and it reached Spain and Sicily. In this age Muslims were ahead of all nations of the world in academic and cultural progress. This period of history is called by European historians as Dark Ages. But it was dark only to Europe not for the Muslim world. The editor of the *World Encyclopaedia* writes under the heading "The Dark Ages": "The term 'dark ages' cannot be applied to the splendid Arab culture which spread over north Africa and into Spain" (p. 30).

How it was that polytheism was an obstacle to scientific investigation. Here is an example to illustrate this point:

In ancient Greek two theories were forwarded regarding sun's revolution, one being the theory of Aristarcus which postulated the earth revolving around the sun. The other was Ptolemy's concept according to which sun revolved around the earth. According to the former concept the earth appeared as round and according to the latter the earth was flat. After the conversion of Constantine (272-337 AD) when Christians came to dominate Europe, they patronised the Ptolemy theory and forcibly suppressed the other concept. The reason being their supposition that Jesus Christ was God and as to this belief the earth had the sanctity of being the birthplace of God. And how the birthplace of God could be satellite. This concept of the sacredness of the earth came in the way of progress in works of investigation and inquiry into nature. Detailed examples of clash between science and polytheistic religion can be seen in Drapier's (1811-1882) book, *Conflict Between Science and Religion*.

During the Abbasid Caliph, Al-Mamun (786-833) Bait al-Hikmah, House of Wisdom was established and with the special patronage of the government, books dealing with both kind of theories regarding the earth, were translated. Muslims, free of doctrinal complexities, found the former concept (of earth revolving around the sun) closer to reality, Caliph At-Mamun, who himself was a great scholar, understood the importance of this problem. He gave orders to his astronomers to measure the length of a terrestrial degree. Philip K. Hitti writes in his *The History of Arabs*:

The object was to determine the size of the earth and its circumference on the assumption that the earth was round. The measurement, carried out on the plain of Sinjar north of the Euphrates and also near Palmyra, yielded $56 \frac{2}{3}$ Arabic miles as the length of a degree of the

meridian—a remarkably accurate result, exceeding the real length of the degree at that place by about 2877 feet. This would make the circumference of the earth 20,400 miles and its diameter 6500. Among those who took part in this operation were the sons of Musa ibn-Shakir and perhaps al-Khwarizmi, whose tables (*zij*), revised a century and a half later by the Spanish astronomer Maslamah al-Majriti (× ca. 1007) and translated into Latin in 1126 by Adelard of Bath, became the bases for other works both in the East and the West. Such Arab astronomical tables replaced all their Greek and Indian predecessors and came to be used even in China (p. 375).

16 October 1989

Have trust in God right up till the end:

When the Prophet left Mecca on his emigration to Medina, he spent the first three days in the Cave of Thur. The Quraysh, who were searching him, eventually arrived at this cave. Abu Bakr, who was in hiding with the Prophet, said, "Prophet of God, look how close the enemy has come. If they were just to look at their feet, they would see us beneath them." "Abu Bakr," the Prophet replied, "What do you think of those two who have God as a third?"

(Al Bidayah wa al Nihayah)

Handle With Care

In social living, it is only those who are so constituted who can carry on in life unaffected by harsh or unfair treatment. Just such men of iron were the Companions of the Prophet, who had mastered the art of rising above provocations both great and small.

The words 'handle with care' written in bold lettering, is a familiar sight on parcels containing delicate fragile items. If parcels of this nature are treated carelessly, the articles in them are liable to break. For this reason directions are written on top of them, indicating that they should be lifted and placed with care.

If we look around us today, we see innumerable individuals who are just like so many fragile objects crying out to be handled 'with care', for the slightest carelessness in dealing with them causes cracks in their oh-so-thin outer shells. These are the people who treat others to outbursts of temper when things are not going exactly as they want, who bear eternal grudges, and who can never forget or forgive a slighting remark (real or imaginary!). Such people are simply a burden to others, and any society which has an over-abundance of such individuals in its ranks can never hope to have the strength of unity.

For a human being to pull his weight in society, he should be made of tougher material – like iron, for example, or, even when treated carelessly, iron neither bends nor breaks. In social living, it is only those who are so constituted who can carry on in life unaffected by harsh or unfair treatment. Just such men of iron were the Companions of the Prophet, who had mastered the art of rising above provocations both great and small. A fine example is that of Abu, Bakr, the first Caliph of Islam, who showed no adverse reaction when one of his own decrees was publicly torn up by Umar. Another exceptional instance is that of Abu Hurayrah, who showed no signs of being offended when accused of lying by the Prophet's wife.

Such instances recurred at regular intervals throughout the lives of the Prophet and his Companions, for they repeatedly had cause for complaint against one another. But they put up with all such irritants, and carried on living together quite successfully as brothers.

If they had been like so many parcels marked 'Fragile'—like the people of today—they would never have had the necessary solidarity to bring about that mighty revolution which changed the entire course of world history.

Turn your Disadvantage into an Advantage *

Thousands have actually found themselves for the first time during sickness. Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau, was sent, as a young doctor, to the mountains where he expected to die of tuberculosis. But he did not die. As he lay in bed he had a vision of a great hospital where he could rebuild other sufferers. Flat on his back, he examined patients not as ill as himself. He raised money and laboured until his dream became the great sanatorium at Sarance, near New York, that has helped thousands of tuberculosis patients. Trudeau's affliction turned an unknown doctor into a physician of world-wide fame.

Eugene O'Neill was an utter drifter with no plan of life until he was twenty-five. A serious breakdown gave him the requisite leisure, he says, "to evaluate the impressions of many years in which experiences had crowded one upon the other, with never a second's reflection." It was in the hospital that he first began to write the plays that revolutionized American drama.

Like any major experience, illness actually changes us. How? Well, for one thing we are temporarily relieved from the terrible pressure of meeting the world head-on. Responsibility melts away like snow on an April roof; we don't have to catch trains, look after babies, or wind the clock. We enter a realm of introspection and self-analysis. We think soberly, perhaps for the first time, about our past and future. Former values are seen to be fallacious; habitual courses of action appear weak, foolish or stubborn; illness, it seems gives us that rarest thing in the world – a *second chance*, not only of health but of life itself!

Illness knocks a lot of nonsense out of us; it induces humility, cuts us down to our own size. It enables us to throw a search light upon our inner selves and to discover how often we have rationalized our failures and weaknesses, dodged virtual issues and run sulkingly away.

*By Louis P. Bisch, M.D. author of *Be Glad You've Neurotic*

Transplanting Fabianism in Indian Soil

The Non- Hitlerian Approach

The German, Adolf Hitler, used always to keep a special pistol with him for his own protection. The 32 calibre gold-washed pistol with its ivory handle, floral engraving and Hitler's inscribed initials was carried off from Hitler's Munich apartment by US soldiers at the end of World War II, and was recently auctioned for \$ 114,000. This is the largest sum ever spent at a public auction on a military collector's item.¹

Shortly before the second world war, Hitler achieved tremendous popularity in what was then an undivided Germany, and was soon to assume the powers of a dictator. His expansionist ("Lebensraum") policies found great favour with public, aimed as they were at conquering Britain and pushing Germany's borders outward to the limits of Europe, and beyond into the vast territories of the USSR. But in spite of all Germany's military might, and a powerful alliance with Italy and Japan, the final result was a humiliating defeat which left Germany crushed and finally divided into two separate regions under the control of the USSR, Britain, France and the USA. Not only had Germany expanded its territory, but it had also lost its national identity in being divided into East and West Germany. At the bitter end, on April 30, 1945, Hitler shot himself dead with the very pistol which he had kept on him for self-defense all throughout this period. Hitler had ruined himself along with his nation.

How Hitler Shot into Prominence

The Great Depression, that is, the economic slump in the US and Europe that began in 1929 lasted almost a decade. During this period, for a variety of reasons, industrial produce piled up in warehouses but failed to find consumers in the market. As a result the factories were closed down. "A long decline in economic activity ensued, until in 1932 one out of every four US workers was unemployed. The Depression at once affected the European economy, rendering jobless millions of workers in Germany, Great Britain, and other industrial countries. By 1932, the total value of world trade had fallen by more than half, as country after country took measures against the importation of foreign goods. The Depression had important consequences in the political sphere, strengthening extremist forces and lowering the prestige of liberal democracy."²

1. *The Times of India*, November 21, 1987.

Whenever faced with any great calamity, the public attributes it more often than not to the misguided policies of the government. As a result, a pervasive atmosphere of mass unrest is generated against those in power. This being the way of public psychology, it is in no way surprising if those who rise in protest against government mismanagement are hailed by the people as their true saviours. The fierier the oratory, the more in earnest the orator is deemed to be. On the other hand, anyone who attempts to make a cool rationalization of the problem in terms of the prevailing circumstances is regarded with suspicion, and seen as the agent of a callous and indifferent set of rulers. The general opinion about a quiet, sincere analyst is that he is only making insidious attempts to divert public attention from the true focus of activity.

It was just such a set of circumstances as were exploited by Hitler during the Great Depression in Germany (1929-1939). He was vociferous in laying the blame for all of the country's afflictions upon the government of that period, and began making rabble-rousing speeches against it. In consequence, he soon became the most popular leader in the eyes of the German public. With the mass support he received—thanks to the economic depression—he turned the Nazis into the largest party in the Reichstag (German Parliament). Hitler was appointed Chancellor in January, 1933, and proceeded to establish a dictatorship in Germany.

A Different Example

British history, during the same period and under the same depressed economic conditions, took quite a different course. It was realized, of course, that a change of system was necessary if the lot of the common man was to improve, but the group which took it upon itself to investigate the prevailing conditions, and to decide upon and promote reform, was very different from Hitler's Nazi party in its style of thinking and functioning. Founded in London as far back as 1833, with the aim of ending the evils of the capitalist system, the Fabian Society was composed mainly of intellectuals. The composition of its membership might have made it too exclusively elitist in its activities had it not been for the efforts of one of the society's leading lights, George Bernard Shaw, (1856-1950) to attract large numbers of ordinary people to the movement by writing articles and making speeches which were to the common man's taste. To further their cause, the young Shaw organized a procession consisting mostly of middle class people, but when it reached those parts of London where the prominent capitalist lived, some of the participants began to indulge in violence and stone throwing, breaking windows and injuring people.

This very first experiment, having taken the ugly turn that it did, turned the leaders of Fabian society against processions and demonstrations as methods of functioning. Since it was evidently extremely difficult to make the public restrict themselves to peaceful demonstrations, they agreed that the Fabian should struggle to achieve their constructive aims without resorting to the ways of protest and demonstrations. Subsequently, the Fabian society adhered strictly to non-demonstration methods such as the use of the press, meetings, academic research, etc. Under the influence of the leading intellectuals of the Fabian society, they stressed the 'inevitableness of gradualism'.³

2. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. IV, p. 696.

The deliberate renunciation of demonstrations as a method of achieving one's goal is a very difficult policy to adhere to in the world of today. It means being content with consolidation, where what is obviously desirable is extension. Then, where innumerable opportunities present themselves to court fame and popularity, one has to subdue this urge and remain content with anonymity. The Fabian society seems to have been singularly successful in following such a policy, for although it played such a great role in British history, its leaders were consistent in foregoing any personal glory.

Because of its moderate way of thinking and avoidance of demonstrations, the Fabian society never became a popular movement in Britain. Even at its zenith in 1946, its members did not number more than 8,500. It was always looked upon as a movement of the intellectuals and it did, in fact, have profound influence upon the intellectual class of Britain. George Bernard Shaw, Sidney and Beatrice Webb (founders of the London School of Economics) and Clement Atlee were some of the more prominent intellectuals who came under its influence. An important stage was brought about in its development when its members joined the British Labour Party, quickly becoming its virtual brain. When the Labour Party came to power in 1945, fifty per cent of its members were Fabians, the most notable being Mr. Clement Atlee. This is quite remarkable considering that the membership of the Fabian society represented barely one per cent of British population.

Prior to 1945, the Conservative Party, headed by Sir Winston Churchill, had been in power, and it was during this period that freedom movements were gaining momentum in the British colonies. Churchill, known for his consummate oratory, has gone down in history as saying: 'I have not become His Majesty's first minister to preside over the liquidation of His Majesty's empire.'

His policy of opposition to colonial freedom was leading Britain in the same direction as Hitler's policy had lead Germany. Pursued to its logical conclusion, it would have lead to armed confrontation with the far-flung British colonies, who would have been put through pitched battles and all the other horrors of war before gaining their freedom. In the final stages, they would ultimately have had to suffer even greater cruelty and oppression than hitherto. British losses would also have been very great in terms of manpower and the national budget, and whatever political and economic ties Britain had with its colonies would have been destroyed forever.

Fortunately, at the end of World War II, in 1945, the Labour Party came to power, and it began to rethink the whole colonial situation, their realistic approach led them under the influence of its Fabian members, to the conclusion that under the prevailing conditions, it would be difficult for Britain to retain its hold over the colonies, who would sooner or later, struggle to freedom. They saw that if Britain could grant them their independence without bloodshed, it would, in so doing, gain a great deal more than it would lose. It was thanks to the Fabian brain that Britain made its historic decision in 1947 to give India (and, subsequently other countries) its freedom.

3. *Encyclopaedia Britannia*, vol. IV, p. 20.

As a result of this realistic decision, Britain gained enormously. On the one hand, it was able, to, a large extent, to safeguard its international economic interests and, on the other, to retain its international political prestige through the British Commonwealth of Nations.

A Lesson for India

Although post-independence circumstances in India have not made it possible for anyone to become “Hitler,” most of our leaders have, nevertheless, begun to follow in his footsteps in that they identify some communal or national affliction, publicly espouse the cause of the sufferers and, blaming the government for the general malaise, begin lam basting those in power. Not only do they get up and make fiery speeches against the authorities, but they set in motion a whole terrain of processions, demonstrations, and rallies whose sole target of abuse is the government.

The public, quickly whipped up to a state of mass hysteria by such leaders, crowd around them in frenzied hero-worship. Such movement gain such strength that they can even cause the government of the day to fall. But we should give careful thought to the notion that “a revolution is a successful effort to get rid of a bad government and set up a worse.”

A recent example of just such a revolution in India was that launched by Jai Praksh Narain (1902-1979). In spite of the Janata Party’s electoral success after the emergency, this “total revolution” ended in total failure.

The Need of the Hour

The most pressing need of the hour is to launch movements in the country patterned on the Fabian Society’s style of functioning, at both communal and national levels. Soon after India gained its independence, Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) formulated a plan for setting up a party of this type, which he named the Jan Congress. He stressed our need for a purely non-political party which would work towards the intellectual training of the public, and remain selflessly constructive in its functioning. For the Jan Congress to be successful, it would have meant the great leaders of the Congress voluntarily relinquishing the personal gains of power politics, and earnestly devoting themselves to this task in a quiet, unpublicized way. But no leader was willing to make a political sacrifice of this nature, so that after Gandhiji’s death, his scheme, too, eventually died a natural death.

For the last twenty years, the writer has himself been the promoter of a quietly constructive, non-agitational movement and, by the grace of God, our mission is progressing satisfactorily. It is my sincere wish that all those who are earnestly concerned about the future of our country, should adopt this selfsame approach. There is no better way of creating a new and brighter future for the nation.

A Spoonful of Sugar

Those who 'sweeten' the 'milk' of others find positions of honour for themselves. On the contrary, those who have only bitterness for others, will receive bitterness from them in return.

A historical incident published in *The Times of India* Supplement, the Neighbourhood Star (March 18-24, 1989) has lesson for us all. It seems that when the first batch of Parsis from Iran landed on the west coast of Gujrat, their community leader – their *peshwa* – went straight to the ruling monarch, Yadav Rana and requested him to allow the Parsis to stay in his state. The Raja uttered not a word in reply, but simply handed the Peshwa a glass full to the brim with milk. This was meant to show him that his state already had its full measure of population and that there was no room for any more people.

The Peshwa did not answer in words either. His response was simply to add a spoonful of sugar to the milk and to return it forthwith to the Raja. This was his way of saying that the Parsis would sweeten their milk – not take possession of it. That is to say that their presence would add sweetness to the life of the state. The Raja was pleased with this response and gave them his permission to stay in Gujrat.

One thousand years have passed since this incident took place, and history has shown how the Parsi Peshwa's words came true. This was because the members of the Parsi community did not waste their time in launching demand and protest movements throughout the country. Instead, they contributed to the progress and development of the country by working harder than everyone else. They made advances, particularly in the fields of education and industry, thus adding to the wealth of the country. In a situation where there were so many 'taker' groups, they achieved, by dint of consistent striving, the status of a 'giver' group. They knew the secret of the good life. In this world, it is the giver who prospers. Those who 'sweeten' the 'milk' of others find positions of honour for themselves. On the contrary, those who have only bitterness for others, will receive bitterness from them in return.